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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002260

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SUBJECT: YOSSI BEILIN DESCRIBES USG ROLE TO CODEL LEVIN:

NOBODY IS AROUND!

Classified By: Charge d'affaires Gene A. Cretz for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Senator Carl Levin and his delegation met on March 31 with Yahad Party Chairman Yossi Beilin. With polite frustration, Beilin repeatedly and in detail expressed his view that the U.S. is not doing enough to advance a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Beilin said he was optimistic that the GOI's withdrawal from Gaza will proceed smoothly, but remained concerned that the USG, the GOI, and the PA are not planning for "the morning after." In particular, Beilin said the USG and the GOI must act now to show ordinary Palestinians that, after Gaza withdrawal, progress toward a resolution of the conflict is possible. Otherwise, he predicted, Palestinian frustrations will turn into renewed violence. Beilin spelled out that, after Gaza withdrawal, his party will pull back the "safety net" it now provides to Sharon's coalition within the Knesset. END SUMMARY.

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE

2. (C) Senator Levin, accompanied by staffers, four constituents, and Embassy notetaker, met with Yahad Party Chairman Yossi Beilin at the latter's offices in Tel Aviv March 31. "I am not sure we are moving ahead" on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict despite the present appearance of progress, Beilin said. Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas must show that the moderate way is bearing fruit, Beilin said, but then questioned Abbas's ability and perhaps even willingness to deliver quickly enough. The Palestinian President is "the treasure" of the political moment, but only sees himself as a transitional leader and would be happy to quit, Beilin said, like last time. Abbas has even kept his "same chauffeur, same secretary, same personal assistant" rather than set up the machinery of a presidential office. Moreover, Beilin added, the "impossible" relationship between Abbas and Prime Minister Ahmad Quraya is preventing Abbas from working with the GOI on disengagement.

3. (C) The bottom line, according to Beilin, is that the GOI and the PA alike are typically not doing enough to meet their commitments. Abbas started down the right path on fugitives and security forces reform, but has walked back from his initial positions. The GOI has not met the commitments it made to Abbas at the Sharm al-Sheik meeting, releasing too few prisoners and dismantling too few checkpoints.

4. (C) A "referee," which Beilin defined as the USG, and monitoring are the missing keys, Beilin said, but he complained that "the referee" was dormant. He said his hope that the second Bush administration would engage was proving empty, and what he called the now-irrelevant dates in the roadmap have not been and will not be changed. President Bush declared he wanted a Palestinian state by 2008, Beilin noted, but "nobody is around!"

GAZA WITHDRAWAL

5. (C) "For me," said the Yahad party chairman, "Gaza is the beginning, and a precedent for continuing in the West Bank. For Sharon, Gaza is the beginning and the end." For Sharon to agree to a Geneva-like solution would be out of character with his actions over the past 38 years. Abbas rejects an interim solution because he believes it will destroy Palestinian leverage by making the unresolved conflict just another border dispute in world opinion.

6. (C) Right now, Beilin said, Gaza withdrawal provides a substitute for a political horizon. After withdrawal, Sharon's preference for a partial and interim solution will collide with Abbas's desire for a complete and permanent resolution. Without a political horizon, Beilin predicted, Palestinian frustrations will boil over into renewed violence.

7. (C) Beilin said he was more optimistic about the withdrawal itself. The GOI, which managed to absorb 35,000 Russian immigrants a month, can move 7,000 settlers without a civil war, he said. Palestinian authorities are sending mixed signals on the fate of assets such as housing and greenhouses, but the GOI now sees the need to preserve them. Beilin predicted that the assets will emerge intact.

COALITION POLITICS

18. (C) Beilin said that after disengagement Yahad will withdraw the "safety net" it is holding under Sharon's coalition, and Sharon understands this even though Beilin has not said so publicly. Ticking off the current coalition line-up, Beilin explained that, without Yahad's six votes, he expects the government will fall, thus leading to early elections. He predicted that Likud will split, putting Labor, Yahad, the Arab parties and Shinui in a position to win enough seats against the ultra-right parties, the national religious parties, and the rightist Likud rump to form a new government coalition. Beilin said he doubts that even a wildly successful withdrawal would influence Sharon's electoral prospects. Instead, he noted, polls show 43 percent of Israelis support Beilin's Geneva solution. Moreover, Beilin said, unlike Labor, which is operating inside Sharon's coalition, Yahad will benefit from the independence it is exercising now. Beilin cited as examples of this independence his party's opposition to Israeli construction in the E-1 area between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumin, and its refusal to endorse Sharon's latest plethora of ministerial nominees.

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